

full time, they are earning poverty wages.

We have 22 percent of our children living in poverty. That is the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world by far. That is double the rate of any other country. And we have at a time that some of our friends are proposing to cut back on WIC and to cut back on food stamps, we have 5 million children in America who are hungry today.

Let's talk about that issue. Tax breaks for the rich increased hunger for children at a time when we have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world.

Let me talk about another issue. Our Republican friends talk about the mandate they received on November 8. Let me say a word about that mandate.

What percentage of the people came out to vote in that mandate? Thirty-nine percent of the people came out to vote. Republicans ended up with a smaller percentage, a little bit larger percentage than the Democrats did. Thirty-nine percent of the people came out to vote.

I am happy to say that in my home city of Burlington, VT on election day just this last Tuesday a progressive was elected mayor. We had 50 percent of the people coming out in a local election.

Why is it that so few people participate in the Democratic process in America? Why is it that poor people in America virtually don't vote at all, many working people don't vote at all? And I think the reason is that the people are basically giving up on the political system.

WELFARE REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nevada [Mr. ENSIGN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. Speaker, since Lyndon Johnson first launched the Great Society programs of the 1960s this country has now spent over \$5 trillion to defeat poverty, a war that we have since lost and lost miserably.

You know, some people around here try to define compassion as how much money we can give to people and how many people we can put on welfare and how many people we can make dependent on a system that has failed that has destroyed the family. That has had crime rate skyrocket over the last 30 years, that has seen out-of-wedlock birth and we need to abandon that system and start over.

Incremental welfare reform will not work. President Clinton said it is time to honor and reward people who work hard and play by the rules. The administration knows that our welfare system is broken.

The people who defend our current welfare system want to keep people, or at least they seem to at least want to keep people in poverty. That can be the

only justification for defending the current welfare system.

We are here and we were sent here to revolutionize the welfare system. It does not work. Government cannot be compassionate by definition because the word compassion means "to suffer with." Only individuals can suffer with other individuals, to offer them a hand up instead of a handout.

Our welfare system was intended to be a safety net in between work. If you happened to get in trouble, there was a safety net. What was intended to be a safety net has now become a hammock that, in time, becomes like a spider web that just entraps people and they cannot get out of it.

When I was campaigning, I would go through and meet different people, and I have a brochure and one of the things in the brochure talked about mandatory work for welfare recipients. Single mothers that I met with, that was the thing that they picked up on almost immediately every time that I met them. Mandatory work for people that are out there struggling, and they know that their tax dollars are going to pay for somebody that could be working, but is not. That is the hallmark of our welfare plan that will be voted on later this month.

You know, our country is a great country. And we have been known to be an opportunity society that has attracted people from around the world. But to continue to keep people in poverty is wrong. It is morally wrong.

This is not a question of economics; this is a question of morality. It is morally wrong to keep people in poverty by making them dependent on a system that they just don't see any way that they can get out of.

I believe that our country needs to become that opportunity society once again. We need to encourage small businesses and jobs, encourage entrepreneurs that are going to get out there and create opportunities for minorities and women and all people. We need to look for economic principles that don't benefit the rich, that don't benefit the middle class or the poor, they benefit all classes of people, young and old, black and white, Hispanic. It does not matter.

We need to have principles that look for situations where all classes of people win. Instead of saying it is the Republicans or the Democrats, we need to put partisanship aside. I have only been here a short time and the partisanship of this place is sickening on committees and on the House floor. We need to put that aside and work for the American people. We were all sent here to solve the problems that a lot of this government has created. We were sent here to solve those problems, and we need to get down to doing the business that the American people sent us here to do.

In conclusion, let me say that I am proud to represent the people of Nevada. They are hard-working people with the work ethic, I think, that is known throughout the West. And be-

cause of that work ethic, they sent me here to get people off of welfare and into work.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Louisiana [Mr. FIELDS] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. FIELDS of Louisiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Kentucky [Mr. WHITFIELD] is recognized for 5 minutes.

[Mr. WHITFIELD addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.]

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AND COLLECTION SYSTEM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland [Mr. HOYER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, one of the most critical areas in need of reform is our child support enforcement and collection system. Too many absent parents are not meeting their responsibility of emotionally and financially supporting their children.

Bringing children into this world and not supporting them is an irresponsible act and it is wrong. The time has come for us to put an end to this irresponsible behavior.

Those of us who work hard and play by the rules can no longer continue supporting a system in which responsibility is abandoned. Enough is enough.

Americans expect and we need to demand that both parents support their children. We must discourage government dependence and expect every able-bodied American to be personally responsible for their actions. The previous speaker talked about that. This is not a partisan issue. This is a critical issue if America is going to succeed to build a better society for our children and generations to come.

Payment of child support should be as certain as taxes and death. Each year failure to collect child support costs our country billions of dollars and children billions of dollars.

The potential for our child support collection is estimated at around \$48 billion. However, only \$14 billion is actually collected. This leaves an estimated collection gap of \$34 billion per year that parents are not paying to support their children and expecting the rest of us to pick up the slack.

Clearly, we need to take care of those children. But we also need to demand that parents are there first.

Moreover, half of the women eligible for child support are receiving nothing. These statistics send a clear signal that we have got a lot more work to do.

Last week President Clinton moved us another step forward in our continuing effort to improve our Nation's child support enforcement system. I want to commend him on taking such a bold step in issuing an Executive order which will improve and expedite child support enforcement for Federal employees.

The Executive order will cross-match the names of Federal employees with Federal employment records and inform the States if there is a match. A determination will be made by the State as to whether wage withholding or other actions are necessary. The order will simplify service of process for Federal employees.

In addition, it will require every Federal agency to cooperate with the Federal parent locator service. The Executive order also cuts the time in half between the day a paycheck is garnished and the day it is received by the custodial parent.

Now, almost every Member of this body knows and my constituents know that I am a strong supporter of Federal employees and fight for their pay and benefits. But they, like others, need to be responsible. And they need to support their children.

The President has established a working model upon which the Congress can build. In the next couple of weeks I hope this House will bring a bill to the floor which contains meaningful reform to the current system.

The previous speaker talked about welfare reform and a couple of others did as well. There is not a person in this body that does not know that welfare is broke. And the issue is, how do we fix it? How do we fix it, and, yes, expect and demand work, but also understand that to get to work, we are going to have to take actions to facilitate that transfer from dependency to independence.

Before we reach the floor for the final vote, there is still ground which can be covered such as revocation of driver's licenses for persons owing child support arrearages. While I applaud my colleagues for including child support in their welfare reform package, I am disappointed that they chose to not include this provision. The inclusion of such a provision would have the effect of again holding parents responsible for support of their children.

The State of Maine has instituted such a plan. Since implementation, the State has revoked less than 20 licenses, but because of the threat of license revocation, the State has received about 12 million additional dollars for back child support.

Just imagine how much could be collected and used to support our Nation's children if this were implemented in all 50 states.

Mr. Speaker, we all agree the child support system is in need of reform. Let us take actions in the coming weeks to make sure that children receive the support from their parents that they are due morally and legally.

PUNITIVE DAMAGES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. BRYANT] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRYANT of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, punitive damages have clearly gotten out of hand. Tonight, I want to share with you a case involving punitive damages in my home State of Tennessee.

Sadly, it involved the death of an individual from Alabama by carbon monoxide poisoning.

The plaintiff claimed that the carbon monoxide poisoning was caused by a natural gas water heater made in Tennessee. It was a used heater obtained by a homeowner and installed by someone with no plumbing background. It was installed behind a wall without combustion air, with no vent, and was connected to an LP gas line. The local gas company wasn't notified, and that was a violation of local law.

In short, the heater was altered from its original manufactured condition and was installed improperly and illegally. Nevertheless, a jury verdict was rendered against State industries. The jury awarded \$5.5 million in compensatory damages and \$6.5 in punitive damages. In fact, one of the jurors wanted to give \$25 million.

On appeal, the Alabama Supreme Court reduced the compensatory damages to \$850,000, but the punitive damages stood.

Now I am not criticizing in any way, shape, or form the person who installed the heater. In his mind's eye, he was lending a helping hand. And I am truly sorry for the death of anyone. But what I am criticizing is the award the jury made.

Punitive damages are intended to punish—not to redistribute wealth. Compensatory damages are designed to compensate for medical costs, lost wages, pain and suffering, and emotional distress. Punitive damages are intended to punish—to send a message that whatever was done wrong, don't do it again.

Had the legislation before us tonight been in place, the plaintiff still could have received almost \$3.5 million. That's a substantial amount of money which would have served to both compensate the plaintiff for their suffering and punish the defendant for whatever wrong they may have done.

This legislation will not impede upon anyone's right to sue, despite the many fallacious and misleading charges by its opponents.

I would support no legislation that would close the courthouse doors to anyone. Access to the courts is a fundamental right that must be acknowledged. But as a lawyer, I can tell you we must have tort reform, and we must have it now.

It's time we establish common sense and reason in our judicial system, and this legislation does just that. Many States have already placed caps on punitive damage awards.

It's time the Federal Government followed their lead, and passed tort reform legislation.

A CHALLENGE TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY: GIVE US YOUR SPENDING CUTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LONGLEY). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

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Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, the balanced budget amendment is not truly dead, but it is in the hospice care unit across the hall. In the House about 130 Democrats voted against it, 2 Republicans. In the Senate, 33 Democrats and 1 Republican voted against it, so apparently, I know the Democrats had some heartburn with the concept of a balanced budget amendment.

One of the big reasons that they gave, particularly in the Senate, was monkeying with the Constitution. Apparently, not monkeying with the Constitution is more important than not letting the country go bankrupt. Obviously, interpretation of the Constitution and its sacredness is relative to proximity to reelection.

I would say that so many times, if you watch the Senators speaking, they flip-flop back and forth more than an old Patsy Cline record on the jukebox.

First, they said, the Constitution: "I'm not going to vote for a balanced budget amendment because of the Constitution." Then, they said "Give us your specifics, Republicans. You want to balance the budget by the year 2002, give us the specifics."

Last week, the Committee on Appropriations gave \$17 billion in specific cuts, very difficult cuts, heart-wrenching in many cases, painful, many times politically risky, politically unwise. Members had programs in their own districts that were reduced, at a time when there is a lot of screaming and crying back home to keep these programs.

What the Republican Party has had to do is say "Look, we are on a sinking boat. We are asking everybody to throw out a little bit of your own luggage, but we think if you do that, we can get the boat ashore. We can guarantee you if you won't let go of your luggage, we are going down."

At a \$4.5 trillion debt, and an item on our budget called interest on the national debt, which is the third largest expenditure in the national budget, \$20 billion a month, we are going bankrupt.

Yet, Mr. Chairman, we hear time and time again, as we did earlier tonight from the gentleman from Missouri, "We are not doing things for the children." Back home, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of when I was a kid. My daddy had a charge account at a pharmacy.